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SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [KISL](#) [ID](#)
SUBJECT: Central and East Java: Increasing
Conservatism Concerns Local Nahdlatul Ulama (NU)
Leadership

(U) Classified by Pol/Econ Officer David Williams,
reasons 1.4 (b), (d).

REFS:

A: 05 JAKARTA 12864 (Seminars on Islam Highlight
Trends in East Java)

1. (C) Summary/Introduction: Over the past several months, what began as a debate of the controversial draft pornography law has revealed deeper fissures with the leadership of Indonesia's largest Muslim organization, Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), showing a quiet shift to the right of NU clerics and their followers. Central and East Java NU leaders are deeply concerned over increasing influence of conservative blocs in the organization, some with close ties to more radical groups like the Islamic Defenders Front (FPI) and Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia (HTI). NU insiders cite four factors leading to the organizational shift: 1) exposure via the mass media to more Wahhabist, radical teachings is pulling students away from traditional learning from senior kiai; 2) NU complacency - ulema no longer actively discuss the key intersection of the nation-state with NU's own social role, as they did in the past; 3) increasing influence of hardliners over senior kiai; and relatedly 4) increased, well-targeted funding from the Middle East, particularly Saudi Arabia, to influence NU cadre down to the village level. End Summary/Introduction.

Background on NU

2. (SBU) East Java is the birthplace of Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), Indonesia's largest Muslim social organization with over 40 million members nationwide, and remains home to the majority of the organization's most powerful clerics (kiai or ulema). NU kiai in Central and East Java, broadly speaking, follow NU's moderate, relatively syncretic teachings incorporating Javanese cultural beliefs with Islam. However, within that framework there have traditionally been significant geographic variations on the definition of "moderate." The numerous powerful kiai in the "Tapal Kuda" (horseshoe) area of East Java, which runs from Madura Island down through the northern coastal areas to Jember, tend to be much more socially

conservative than their counterparts in other areas of the province. Many of the most powerful kiai in these coastal cities are themselves Madurese. Unusually, the organization's formal East Java (Ali Maschan Moesa) and Central Java (Adnan) chairmen are known more as Islamic intellectuals than as traditional scions of major NU families.

Leaving the Middle Path?

¶3. (SBU) One of NU's key basic values since its inception has been its adherence to the "middle path" (jalur tengah), as a deliberate center between Islamic liberalism and radicalism in Indonesia. The current internal debate ("whither NU") may have been sparked by the anti-pornography bill but the real focus is NU's stance on religion and the State and whether NU national Chairman Hasyim Muzadi is pushing the organization (and its public image) in a more conservative direction. Historically, NU kiai were among those leaders who helped draft "Pancasila", Indonesia's founding five principles that enshrine religious tolerance and suggest (although do not state) the separation of religion from the State.

¶4. (SBU) ConGen Surabaya contacts acknowledge, as radical groups in Indonesia have become increasingly vocal public presences in recent years (Ref. A), the NU "middle" has shifted increasingly rightward. Those critical of NU's shift cite four main reasons for increasing conservatism/Wahabism: 1) exposure via the mass media to more Wahabist, radical

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teachings is pulling students away from traditional learning from senior kiai; 2) NU complacency - ulema no longer actively discuss the key intersection of the nation-state with NU's own social role, as they did in the past; 3) increasing influence of hardliners over senior kiai; and relatedly 4) increased, well-targeted funding from the Middle East, particularly Saudi Arabia, to influence NU cadre down to the village level.

¶5. (C) National NU Chairman Hasyim Muzadi himself is seen as a political opportunist by some and his association with more radical groups such as the Islamic Defender's Front (FPI) and Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia (HTI) are anathema to mainstream NU leaders. East Java NU Chairman Ali Maschan Moesa noted to us, "Muzadi appears to want to be a neutral leader, in the middle between hardliners and non-hardliner groups. Unfortunately, this kind of approach has changed his style." As Muzadi himself told us back in 2004 soon after his controversial election as NU National Chairman, he has serious ambitions for both NU and himself and he intends to work with whatever political parties or groups help him attain his goals. His recent closer association with radical groups appears to be part of that strategy. Muzadi was vocal and public in his denunciations of President Bush's recent visit to Indonesia. He said that even if he were invited to meet with the President, he would not attend and was scheduled to headline an anti-Bush rally that included FPI leader Habib Rizieq and Abu Bakar Ba'ashir as speakers. Distaste for Muzadi's at times unrepentant politicking has simmered below the surface since his 2004 appointment and his unsuccessful run for Vice President that same year.

¶6. (SBU) While in private, NU leaders argue heatedly over the organization's views on key issues, in public they have tried to present a united front.

That facade has slipped somewhat as former President Abdurrahman Wahid (aka Gus Dur) and his erstwhile protege, Muzadi, have increasingly traded public barbs. Additionally, NU provincial leaders previously appeared to have been unwilling to publicly criticize or contradict Muzadi. The anti-pornography bill debated definitely changed that dynamic. Muzadi has increasingly been the target of criticism from NU provincial leaders; his full public endorsement of the controversial anti-pornography bill sparked an unprecedented level of public disavowal from East Java and other NU leaders. In April 2006, key East Java NU leaders took this debate to the editorial pages of the Jawa Pos, the largest daily newspaper in Eastern Indonesia. Both Ali Maschan and Adnan view Muzadi's statements supporting the anti-pornography bill as an organizational tipping point, publicly opposing NU leadership stances on social issues.

17. (C) East Java NU leaders are concerned with Muzadi's increasingly close relationship with Islamic Defenders' Front (FPI) leader Habib Rizieq, whom he has met frequently over the past year. Part of the furor appears to be embarrassment: East Java NU leaders take great pride in flaunting their organization's moderate credentials; Muzadi's full-bore backing of the anti-pornography bill and all its controversial precepts--several of which our contacts have described as an "Islamization" effort--put NU, however rhetorically, in the same camp as Indonesia's most radical organizations, such as FPI and Hizbut Tahrir.

18. (C) Many NU clerics, including in its senior ranks, are also relatively active members of some very conservative groups such as the Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI), known for its fatwas on a variety of subjects, including a recent death fatwa against Liberal Islam Network leader Ulil Abschar Abdalla. While NU has organizationally always supported pluralism, MUI fatwas have held that pluralism is against Islam. Ali Maschan has

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suggested to us that Sahal Mahfudz, a senior NU kiai and member of MUI, is "staying too quiet" and letting more radical members of MUI determine the organization's agenda of intolerance. Whether or not that is the case, the fact remains that some leading NU clerics are now becoming indelibly associated with some very radical aims. One of the most conservative members of MUI is its deputy, Ma'ruf Amin, who is NU. He also voiced strong public objections to the President Bush visit.

Whither the Clerics?/Eating NU Piece by Piece

19. (C) As noted political commentator and NU insider Muhammad Asfar put it to ConGen, "the traditional clerics are the backbone of NU". The so-called traditional clerics are the senior kiai, many of whom descend from the founding fathers of NU and are considered "the keepers of the flame." However, some of the most influential of these kiais are increasingly themselves influenced by hardliners. East Java NU leaders are distressed by the increasing ties between NU and FPI. For example, a Bangkalan, East Java area kiai recently became head of the local chapter of FPI. (Note: Bangkalan is the westernmost-city on Madura Island; while most Madurese and Madurese kiai are NU, they are considered more socially conservative than counterparts in other areas of the province. End Note.) Our contacts have raised other cases of

concern, such as several recent incidents of local NU leaders joining forces with more radical groups (e.g. an NU branch chairman in the East Java city of Nganjuk recently joined HTI).

¶10. (C). NU East Java Chairman Ali Maschan summed it up, "In the past, these groups [like FPI and Hizbut Tahrir] attacked NU, but now they eat NU piece by piece by intensively lobbying NU clerics." For example, they were able to persuade Kiai Yusuf Hasyim (respected leader of the famous Tebu Ireng pesantren, uncle of former President Wahid, and descendent of NU's founder) and Kiai Abdullah Faqih (venerated leader of Langitan pesantren in Lamongan, East Java) to become members of the newly formed National Leaders Council (Dewan Imamah Nusantara - DIN), a "forum to represent Muslim interests". (Note: Other members of DIN include East Java FPI Chairman Habib Abdurrahman Assegaf; the group has held joint demonstrations with FPI and other hard-line Islamic groups. End Note.) Maschan noted, "Those hardliner groups are smart. They told those old clerics that the establishment of a new such institution is for the sake of Islam. In fact, if we notice carefully, "Imamah" is actually "Khilafah" which is the caliphate Hizbut Tahrir is fighting for." What rankles NU pluralists the most is that the radical groups, at their core, oppose the State and the unity of Indonesia.

Middle East Connections

¶11. (SBU) Hard-line groups can easily afford public outreach campaigns because they receive financial assistance from Middle East Countries. Many of NU's most prominent leaders, such as former President of Indonesia and NU Chairman Wahid, studied at al-Azhar University in Cairo. However, Saudi Arabia is beginning to be the destination of choice for some NU scions, our contacts say. Madurese clerics, many of whom have longstanding ties to the Middle East, are increasingly sending their students to Saudi universities rather than the traditional NU higher education bastions of Jombang and Kediri. According to Ali Maschan, this is an important factor in the increasing Wahhabism in NU. We ourselves have observed and spoken with numbers of teachers from Pakistan, Egypt, and other areas during visits to several Tapal Kuda-area pesantrens.

Comment

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¶12. (C) It is clear that hardline groups are increasingly prominent and public in East Java, and equally clear that moderate NU leaders are at somewhat of a loss in confronting this growth. They have no answers to the growing availability of radical Islamic viewpoints from satellite television and the internet which impact the views of their members. The "anti-Muslim" perception that world events in Iraq, Lebanon and Palestine pit the West against underdog Muslim Arabs is strong in rural East and Central Java. Many East Javanese, who see themselves as underdogs compared to wealthier Javanese in Jakarta and the more cultured Javanese of Central Java, sympathize with the plight of Middle East Muslims, making them easy targets for propaganda eschewing radical or militant aims. NU's lack of an outreach budget and its loose network of clerics tied together by a general set of principles and long standing traditions make divergence from their norm easier for clerics wishing to move their

flocks in a more conservative direction.

PASCOE